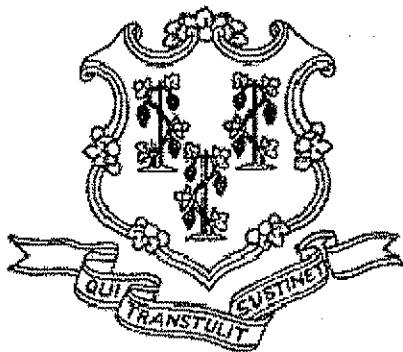


F.T.R.

State Agency List



AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION  
STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591  
(860) 240-8555  
FAX (860) 240-8444

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

Thursday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011

3:00 pm in Room 2C

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis the Executive Director with the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission is an advocate for the African-American community. We accomplish our mission primarily through research, policy analysis, outreach and information sharing. We are here today to comment on ***SB 1195 – An act concerning school finance reform.***

This Commission welcomes any measure to improve the funding mechanisms that support the educational achievement of our youth. Education is an important investment in developing the future workforce and leaders to function effectively, in an increasingly competitive global economy. As such developing a framework that promotes positive educational outcomes, accountability and transparency is good sound policy. ***SB. 1195*** seeks to incorporate key fundamental principles in

funding public education on the basis of students' needs, hence we are supportive.

There are specific aspects of this bill that we are particularly interested in. The component that includes what is termed as a "student success factor" seeks to consistently fund high poverty students with extra learning needs across all public schools. Current policy is failing to meet the learning needs of all students in public schools. Poverty impedes the progress of a student's ability to achieve academic excellence. Abundant research supports this notion and establishes strong correlations between poverty and poor educational achievement, yet 26 percent of children in our state live in low-income families. In the African-American community the poverty rates are almost twice that, with 50 percent of children living in low-income families.<sup>1</sup> Therefore it is essential that this component of our public-school financing structure is addressed to reflect these wealth disparities.

We are also in agreement with a concept in the proposal that seeks to accurately factor in both a town's revenue-generating capacity and a town's median household income to determine its overall level of wealth and ability to pay for education locally. Median incomes vary from town to town. The median family income of African-Americans residing primarily in the urban areas of our state is estimated at \$49,039, whereas Connecticut's median family income is roughly \$64,851.<sup>2</sup> Median income greatly influences a town's ability to fund public education, accordingly must be a primary factor in determining funding needs.

If there is one area there should be consensus in, is the fact that our current system of funding is convoluted, overly complicated and opaque. We need a system that is transparent to the public, easy to understand with common accounting procedures that all school districts can adhere to. While there is no

---

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Children in Poverty, *Connecticut Demographics of Low-Income Children*

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Connecticut - *Selected Population Profile in the United States (Black or African American alone)*

perfect system in funding public education, this proposal is at least an important step in revamping a funding system that by all indications is not getting the best return for its investment. We therefore ask that this proposal is given serious consideration as our state continues to look at ways to improve funding public school choice. In conclusion this Commission remains a willing and committed partner in supporting the state's effort in reforming school financing. The Commission will do anything in its capacity to help ensure that all Connecticut's children get the best education possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

